**A Joint Initiative by the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Earthrise Trust**

**Thought Provocation**

**Dialogue on**

**(Re)Imagining**

**the Future of Society**

**And the State**

**For a Just, Sustainable and Peaceful World**

Final November 2016

*A CALL TO ACTION*

*“We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise.*

*To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.*

*We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.*

*Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations”.*

*Preamble to the Earth Charter*

(Notes: The Earth Charter is a product of a decade-long, worldwide, cross-cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values. The Earth Charter project began as a United Nations initiative, but it was carried forward and completed by a global civil society initiative. The Earth Charter was finalized and then launched as a people’s charter on 29 June, 2000 by the Earth Charter Commission, an independent international entity, in a ceremony at the Peace Palace, in The Hague. The drafting of the Earth Charter involved the most inclusive and participatory process ever associated with the creation of an international declaration. This process is the primary source of its legitimacy as a guiding ethical framework. The legitimacy of the document has been further enhanced by its endorsement by over 6,000 organizations, including many governments and international organizations. www.earthcharter.org)

# Introduction

Earth is home to just over 7 billion humans. They are citizens and residents under the jurisdiction of 193 nation states and territories defined mostly by artificial borders. We know the planet and its people face an unprecedented ecological crisis due to the devastating impacts of humans on the planet and its natural resources over the last 200 years. Our demands on earth today are exceeding our planetary resources (Scientists currently estimate that we need 1.5 Planets to sustain our lifestyle).

The current global political economy continues to concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a tiny extremely wealthy global elite. Since the beginning of the new millennium we witnessed millions of people across the globe uniting against war, unfair global trade, poverty and for climate justice. The protest movements, inspired by the Arab popular uprisings in 2010, have spread globally. Many have been nicknamed as “Occupy” movements such as Occupy Wall Street, in reference to how Egyptians occupied the famous Tahir Square during their uprising.

Similar to the popular Arab protests and the recent anti-austerity protests in Europe, the numerous struggles for basic public services to meet natural human needs in many countries and the anti-racist struggles seem largely organized and carried out by the young. They are often amongst the jobless or those struggling with multiple levels of social exclusion, while also representing the views and concerns of all ages. The new political lexicon speaks of a “futureless youth” generation. Our new collective struggle is to reverse that sense of despair and hopelessness that face the majority.

This struggle for a new, democratic, just and sustainable world is gaining support and citizens are taking action. Their desire for change is becoming unstoppable. People are demanding governments and public institutions honour international treaties and promote national compacts that respect their rights to public goods and services, their dignity and the free expression of their will as citizens. People are demanding both immediate relief and pro-poor solutions whilst articulating their own campaign slogans for a transition towards a new just, egalitarian and sustainable global society. One that respects, protects and promotes the rights and freedoms enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights for all of humankind without exception.

# Time for a new people’s narrative for the 21st Century?

The Earth Charter is therefore is more than a pact on paper but a solemn call to action by all those who care about the future of our common humanity and life on Mother Earth. This year marks the 71st anniversary of the adoption of the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights – a set of rights and noble promises adopted by governments in the aftermath of the brutality, social upheaval and devastation inflicted by the Second World War (1939 to 1945). On 1 February 2013, the UN High Level Panel released for consultation, the Post 2015 Development Agenda, a new vision and action plan around a set of goals and targets that will replace the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000. In the words of the Eminent Panel, the Post 2015 Agenda argues “business as usual is not an option”.

The report articulates the need for the agenda to be driven by “five, big transformative shifts” viz. “ leave no one behind, put sustainable development at the core, transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth, build peace and effective open and accountable institutions for all and forge a new global partnership”. The panel believed that these five shifts can end the “inequality of opportunity” suffered by billions of people and bring together social, economic and environmental issues in a coherent, effective and sustainable way. It is hoped that this can build a new generation that not only believes in these goals, but also will act collectively in different ways to build a better world that does not persist in privileging some over others.

Following numerous consultations across the globe, albeit with the limited direct input of ordinary people, in September 2015 marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of the UN, Heads of States gathered at the General Assembly adopted “ Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. Included in the declaration is a description of the sorry state of our humanity and the planet:

*“We are meeting at a time of immense challenges to sustainable development. Billions of our citizens continue to live in poverty and are denied a life of dignity. There are rising inequalities within and among countries. There are enormous disparities of opportunity, wealth and power. Gender inequality remains a key challenge. Unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, is a major concern. Global health threats, more frequent and intense natural disasters, spiralling conflict, violent extremism, terrorism and related humanitarian crises and forced displacement of people threaten to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades.*

*Natural resource depletion and adverse impacts of environmental degradation, including desertification, drought, land degradation, freshwater scarcity and loss of biodiversity, add to and exacerbate the list of challenges which humanity faces. Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development. Increases in global temperature, sea level rise, ocean acidification and other climate change impacts are seriously affecting coastal areas and low-lying coastal countries, including many least developed countries and small island developing States. The survival of many societies, and of the biological support systems of the planet, is at risk” (www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org).*

The declaration further states “This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. We recognise that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.”

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets demonstrate the scale and ambition of this global undertaking. They seek to realise the human rights of all. They are universal, integrated and indivisible. They balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

The goals and targets will stimulate action over the next fifteen years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet:

**People**

We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.

**Planet**

We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.

**Prosperity**

We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

**Peace**

We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

**Partnership**

We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalised Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focussed in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

No progressive minded person will find much disagreement with these goals and the 5P’sIn context this could be regarded as a “solemn pact” between “we, the peoples” and our respective governments at national, regional, global and multilateral agency levels. . Furthermore the declaration describes the what, how, who and when implementation of these noble goals.

The declaration therefore implores society to ask “What kind of transformative state is required to spearhead the “transformative shifts” needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda?” At a national level, it requires us to examine the role of constitution making as the supreme compact of the people and the state it establishes to meet its obligations to people.

If we move from the premise that democratic power is vested in people and the legitimacy of any governing authority of the day and the state organs it presides over, are derived from the free will expressed by the people, then what are the characteristics and nature of the state we require to achieve the SDG’s is the big question humanity faces, if we are to change the current trajectory and alter the course of history and a transition towards a just sustainable and peaceful world.

The process of regular democratic elections at every level in society requires informed and active citizens as an essential pre-requisite for building social compacts and to use this as a basis for holding elected and appointed public office bearers accountable. Free, democratic consensus and consent is preferred over manipulated and manufactured consent if “no one is to be left behind”. This is serious, hard painstaking work and there are no short-cuts to achieving a state “from the people, by the people, for the people”.

# So what then is to be (Un) Done?

For many years, in response to corporate globalisation, we have been talking about the slogan “think global act local”. The struggle for quality public health and education, decent livelihoods, better wages, housing, food and land are ultimately struggles for a new and just world order based on a development path that promotes equity, human dignity, social justice and care for the environment. Through these actions people are determined to change their conditions and alter the course of history. Whilst significant local battles are indeed being won, the global war is far from being won.

Active citizens from around the world recognise that our struggles for political, economic, social and environmental justice are the same and inter-connected. The nature of the problems we confront are similar. The context at local level may be different. The need for greater unity and human solidarity amongst citizens across the globe is clear. The call for organising and strengthening people-to-people solidarity across states is growing and gaining momentum. As activists the struggles we see in our respective countries should not be seen in isolation to those taking place elsewhere on the planet. We are all interconnected and part of one living system that is in a systemic crisis.

In his book *Blessed Unrest*, author Paul Hawken, an environmental and social activist, examines how social justice and environmental organisations across the globe are building a leaderless global movement agitating for fundamental change. He explores a history of courage, diversity and innovation of the movement going back many centuries. In his estimates, there are over two million organisations from billion dollar non-profits to single person internet campaign sites which “collectively comprise the largest (unstoppable) movement on Earth” that brings together “humanity’s collective genius ”. Yet this movement of people goes largely ignored by the mainstream media and is undermined by the ruling elites.

In his book, “*Boiling Point –can citizen action save the world*?, Kumi Naidoo, the Director of the African Civil Society Initiative, provides serious insights and argues that civic society should not operate in a vacuum detached from the struggles of people on the ground . He poses the question about the extent to which organisations “are ready to strengthen and deepen their understanding and embrace the organisational and operational implications of the interconnectedness” of their work.

The “boiling point” poses particular new challenges for civic society in so far as building effective collaboration and synergies between local, national, regional and global struggles. This requires a critical reflection and engagement across the leadership spectrum in order to build new forms of organisation, new coalitions and new alliances if we want to effect the changes required. He argues that the “promise of real change – sustainable and enduring impact – is a long term macro-level project taking perhaps 10 to 25 years” and therefore points to the need for civic society adopting a long-term view.

Despite the short term nature of their funding and financing regimes, many leaders in civic society organisations support this view and see it as a catalyst for reflection and the search for new strategies and tactics to build global citizen action across the artificiality of the current territorial borders.

Civic activists are also mindful of the implications and limitations of the “short termism” of their work and campaign actions, and often omissions, in the absence of a coherent and collective view of the long-term future of people and society.

Addressing such contemporary problems requires an engaged study of the current moment humanity finds itself in and some speculation about the trajectory humanity is tied into and what the future may look like. This requires a collective reflective discussion on the role of what has today become referred to as “civic society” that supposedly acts as the interface between the state, corporations and people. Such a study cannot be blind to the current authority of the nation state and its failures to curb the power of multinational corporations that are wreaking havoc on communities, society and the environment.

Most activists in general and senior leaders in particular are busy, stressed and working hard under difficult conditions to implement work plans. Often they are unwittingly locked into a system that forces them into log-frames and silo based reporting to donors. The people they claim to represent often feel alienated and disconnected from the leadership. This is certainly the case in SA. Clearly lacking is a distinct political narrative that captures the imagination**,** and that embodies a strategy that understands mass organising at a community level **in** the 21st century.

# The Inaugural NMF Earthrise Dialogue

The dialogue arises from aspirations for a common humanity based on the ideas of building sustainable peace, social justice, human rights, development and democratic participation of people in all spheres of society. The main object of the dialogue is to create a safe reflective space for a group of thought leaders. Specifically it seeks to build insights by harnessing collective learning and knowledge.  The host partners have assembled a small group of experienced activists in a variety of fields and who could contribute actively to the various conversations.

The Inaugural Dialogue is scheduled to take place from 11-13 November 2016 at the Earthrise Mountain Lodge and the Rustlers Valley Farm in Ficksburg, Free State. The meaning and practice of dialogue involves people coming together in a variety of different contexts at every level of society to participate in meaningful, deep, reflective thinking together, questioning and honestly sharing perspectives that create new knowledge, understanding and meaning. It is a potentially powerful process for collective learning and find solutions to the problems we face. The success of any dialogue both process and substance depends on those who gather around. An important principle is that they gather around the table as equals irrespective of their status and titles in society.

In our current topsy turvy turbulent world hope we must be able to let our guard down, engage freely, explore new ideas and connections and hopefully avoid a win-lose debating model towards a more, comradely, equitable and sustained approach towards answering the important questions we face.

The questions that could help frame a dialogue could include the following broad questions for such an enquiry:

1. **What is the future of global governance, regional communities and nation states?**
   * How can global civic society (without borders) open pathways to a world freed from the constraints of the historically-specific and contrived borders;
   * Given the strengths and weaknesses of the UN and from our own experiences whether and how the UN SDG Agenda 2030 can be used as a framework for *rethinking and sculpting a future of humanity* at peace with itself and its relationship with the all forms of life on our planet.
2. **What are the critical and pivotal *‘transformational shifts’ required* to successfully meet the basic needs of all humanity?**

* A future global political economy that will satisfy basic human rights and fundamental needs e.g. the right to food, education, health, livelihoods and settlements;
* Exploring the ideas of our common humanity, equality, human rights, democracy, social justice, peace as *a global social compact*
* Building co-operation and human solidarity for the common good - the role of people in safeguarding the commons, public goods and services.

1. **How can citizens reimagine society, rebuild democracy and reclaim the state as theirs**?
   * the entrenchment of true democratic principles at all levels from local to national and international levels;

* P*romoting a deeper and better understanding* of how people, communities and organisations can reshape current politics and the concept of democracy and government of the people, by the people and for the people.
* The future of the state and society in SA, particularly in the context of contemporary political struggles e.g. against inequality, in the tertiary education sector, for quality public services and reclaiming the state from capture by the private sector.
  + Traditional and new forms of organising and organisation building

1. **To assess what we need to deconstruct in politics in order *to reconstruct sustainability and resilience* for future generations**.

* Distilling current issues and challenges shaping the form and nature of society and the context in which collective learning is taking place within society.
* Building and advancing culture that advances healing, harmony and our humanity.
* How can the Earth Charter be used as a way of deepening consciousness and mobilising action for a just sustainable and peaceful world?

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